

Front Page	Edi Page	Other Page
---------------	-------------	---------------

WAT 5 1961

TARENTUM, PA.
VALLEY NEWS

E. 24,019

MAY 4 1961

Covering Up Blunders

AS might have been expected, some Administration officials are blaming the press in part for the Cuban debacle which they created. This attempt to distribute the blame elsewhere overestimates the role of the newspapers in the invasion and thoroughly underestimates the role of the press in a free society.

One high official involved in the invasion, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reports, actually went so far as to seek a legal opinion on press curbs. He soon learned that such a law would be unconstitutional. That lesson should be elementary to officials of all ranks and stations.

The same official still thinks, however, that some restrictions might be legal, and that in any event the press might be urged to submit to the kind of voluntary censorship that exists in wartime. It was this kind of censorship which President Kennedy must have had in mind when he addressed the American Newspaper Publishers Association convention last week.

The press is not, however, like the Central Intelligence Agency, a parliamentary arm of government. It has responsibility, of course, to protect national security. But its principal responsibility is to inform the American people.

Some official critics blame the press for exaggerating the Cuban invasion attempt and, as a result, Cas-

tro's victory. Yet official secrecy prompted these errors. Newspapers and other media had to depend on a babble of refugee voices and even on a small public relations firm which issued refugee "communiques." The reporting was no more confused than Administration policy.

Yet these same critics argue that the press should not have reported the invasion plans in advance. If this were so, the Government should have kept the scheme secret—and it was about as secret as James Reston's words, "as opening day in Yankee Stadium." Keeping such open secrets is certainly not the business of the press, especially when the secrets involve great risk to the nation's foreign policy. A better informed public might, in fact, have cautioned against a filibustering expedition in Cuba. Some newspapers, at least, warned of the consequences.

The critical officials seem to be arguing both that the press did not print the full truth about the Cuban invasion, and that the press should not have printed so much of the truth. It is safe to assume, however, that they would have favored the fullest reporting had their proxy invasion been a success. What they seem to want the press to hide is not so much official secrets as official blunders. No worse case could be made by leaders of a representative government for restrictions on a free press.

The above editorial also appeared

in the following other newspaper : NEW KENSINGTON DISPATCH.

PA. - MAY 4, 1961